

Testimony for Judiciary Committee Hearing on HB 4552

My name is Julie Curtis and I am the lead Cruelty Investigator for the Humane Society of Huron Valley in Ann Arbor. I have been in this position for 7 years and am a Level III trained investigator and have served as an expert witness on several animal cruelty cases. In the last 5 years, our agency has done 1300 investigations of animal cruelty in Washtenaw County alone.

I am here to express my strong support for HB 4552. I am grateful to Rep. Pam Byrnes for introducing this legislation and to all of the supporters of this greatly needed change.

It is my understanding that Rep. Byrnes was motivated to draft this legislation in part by the animal cruelty case in Superior Township. As the Investigator on that case, let me review for you that case and how this legislation would be beneficial.

On March 16, 2006 a female Rottweiler was found bound by her feet with duct tape and decapitated. By March 27th 3 other decapitated dogs and five other dead dogs, that appeared to be linked to the case, had been found. A tip line was set up and we received over 300 tips. Those tips were investigated in conjunction with the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department. Unfortunately we have yet to find the person or people responsible. However, when we do, without this law, the punishment would be the same if it was one animal or as it would be for nine. This law will allow the guilty party to be punished for each animal that was mutilated.

I once investigated and prosecuted a case where 41 animals were severely abused. These were Golden Retrievers, Irish Setters, Great Danes, Poodles, Boxers, and Chihuahuas that were tortured, starved, and beaten for every day of their lives for years on end. Many were too weak to stand, and had lived their lives in dark closets and crates too small for them to even turn around in. Their suffering was very obvious and, frankly, traumatic to witness even by the most seasoned animal welfare officers. Even though that person was charged with numerous counts of animal cruelty his punishment was only as if it were for one animal.

This legislation will help us get better for the innocent animals that suffer at the hands of those that are entrusted with their care.

But this is not just for animals.

There is a well researched and proven link between animal violence and human violence. Animal cruelty is often an indicator of current or future criminal and violent behavior. When I investigate dog fighting there is almost always drug dealing, weapons, and other gang related activity involved. Domestically violent assailants often abuse or kill pets as a way to threaten and intimidate their partners. Rapists and murderers often start their violent careers by hurting innocent animals.

Taking animal cruelty more seriously can be a front line defense against community and family violence and other forms of serious crime.

Thank you so much for hearing my testimony today and for considering this important legislation.